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Bhairahawa Jomsom

TODAY

NATIONAL

With the onset of the rainy season, incidents of snakebite are on the rise in western Tarai. Snakebite treatment centres and hospitals in Sudurpaschim Province are now full of patients. Pg 2

The CPN-UML on Sunday demanded that the prime minister step down immediately, arguing that the country is facing natural disasters and a minority government cannot make crucial decisions. Pg 5

INTERVIEW

First, we will review the progress and the challenges in implementing the constitution in the past decade, says Pradeep Gyawali. Pg 4



MONEY

The vegetable supply chain has been disrupted by the inundation of large areas of standing crops in a wave of floods and landslides across the country, pushing prices in the Valley to new highs. Pg 6

SPORTS

Uruguay beat Brazil on penalties (4-2) to reach the semi-finals of Copa America after their game ended goalless on Sunday. Uruguay will now face Colombia, who beat Panama 5-0, in the semi-finals on Thursday. Pg 7



Rescuers from the Armed Police Force take displaced people to safety at Dohara Chandani Ward 10 in Kanchanpur on Sunday. PHOTO: COURTESY OF APF

Floods and landslides kill 15 people in two days. Three missing, 21 injured

Heavy rains affect normal life across the country on Sunday as well.

By SUDEEP KAINI
KATHMANDU, JULY 7

At least 15 people have lost their lives, three have gone missing and 21 others have been injured in incidents of floods and landslides triggered by incessant rains across the country since Saturday.

According to the Nepal Police headquarters, 15 people from Koshi, Bagmati, Gandaki and Lumbini provinces were killed in incidents of water-induced disasters as of Sunday evening.

According to police spokesperson Dan Bahadur Karki, Gandaki Province was the worst hit by heavy rains in the two days. According to him, three people were missing. Sixty houses were inundated and over 150 people displaced in rain-induced incidents.

Among the missing are a man from Belaka-3 of Udaypur district, a girl at Simta of Surkhet and a woman from Bhirkot of Syangja district.

Three people each were buried to death at Biruwa Municipality-6 of Syangja and Shuklagandaki-7 of Tanahun. Two people were killed at Karkineta Phalewas of Parbat in a landslide.

According to police, floods took two lives at Lamahi and Rajpur of Dang and a man was killed at Mathagadhi of Palpa. Likewise, two people at Roshi of Kavre and one individual at Nagarjun of Kathmandu were killed, according to police.

Incessant rains over the past few days affected daily life nationwide on Sunday as well. Scores of families have been displaced while several highways and road sections were obstructed due to floods and land-

slides triggered by monsoon rains across the country.

In Darchula, 60 families were shifted to safer locations as the flooded Seti river entered settlements in Dungad of Sigas Rural Municipality-5.

Chief District Officer Bhimkant Sharma said the displaced people were shifted to the building of the local Sharada Secondary School. According to him, several settlements on the river banks in wards 5, 6 and 7 of Sigas are prone to flooding.

Meanwhile, water flow in the Mahakali river increased significantly on Sunday. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police in Kanchanpur Umesh Joshi, water flow

In Darchula, 60 families were shifted to safety as Seti flood entered settlements in Dungad.

in the river measured 185,450 cusec at 3pm. The water level is expected to go higher as the rain continues in the area.

Three settlements in Dohara Chandani Municipality-10 were inundated as the floods in the Mahakali and Jogbudha rivers entered the settlements on Sunday. "The floods inundated our area. We came to the safe house built by the security personnel," said Basanti Budha of Kutiyabhar of Dohara Chandani-10. In Achham, nine families were displaced in a massive landslide at Seripakha of Chaurpati Rural Municipality-6.

>> Continued on page 2

NHRC wants war crimes and crimes against humanity to be non-amnestiable

National Human Rights Commission unveils report today detailing its efforts and positions on transitional justice.

By BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, JULY 7

The National Human Rights Commission has said that the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act must include war crimes and crimes against humanity as serious violations of human rights while also ensuring justice to former Maoist child soldiers.

The constitutional human rights watchdog made its position as the three major parties worked to finalise the amendment bill to the Act under consideration in a parliamentary committee. Neither the existing Act nor the amendment bill includes war crimes, crimes against humanity and the issues of child combatants.

In its report "The National Human Rights Commission and Transitional Justice", the commission has said that together with murder, enforced disappearance, abduction or disappearances after the kidnapping, torture, rape or other sexual violence, war crimes and crimes against humanity should also be classified as non-amnestiable crimes.

The 150-page report the commission is set to unveil on Monday includes its position on the long-pending transitional justice process while also docu-

menting the efforts it made to deliver justice to the war-era victims of human rights violations.

Since its establishment in 2002, the commission has investigated 1,073 cases related to the 1996-2006 insurgency and recommended actions against 222 including former Home Secretary and chief of Nepal Police.

Negotiators struggling to finalise whether to list murder as a serious violation of rights.

Following successive governments' reluctance to follow its recommendations, the commission made public the list of perpetrators in October 2020 and January 2024.

The leaders in negotiation are still struggling to finalise whether to list murder as a serious violation of human rights. Despite long negotiations, they have yet to sort out issues of minor Maoist soldiers and sentence reduction. They are also divided on whether victims who refuse to reconcile should be allowed to take their cases to court.

>> Continued on page 2



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Could Kamala Harris beat Donald Trump in November?

A majority of Americans see Harris in a negative light, as they do both men in the fray.



US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks in New Orleans, Louisiana, on Saturday. REUTERS

By NANDITA BOSE, JEFF MASON & BIANCA FLOWERS/REUTERS
WASHINGTON, JULY 7

She worries Republican donors, has name recognition, and Democratic Party heavyweights are beginning to line up behind her.

Vice President Kamala Harris would be President Joe Biden's natural successor if he bowed to growing pressure and stepped aside as the Democratic candidate in the 2024 election, top Democrats say.

Now party donors, activists and officials are asking: Does she have a bet-

ter chance than Biden of beating Donald Trump? Biden is staying in the race, he has said repeatedly.

Harris, 59, a former US senator and California attorney general, would be the first woman to become president of the United States if she were the party's nominee and prevailed in the November 5 election. She is the first African American and Asian person to serve as vice president.

Her three-and-a-half-year White House tenure has been characterised by a lacklustre start, staff turnover, and early policy portfolios including migration from Central America that did not produce major successes.

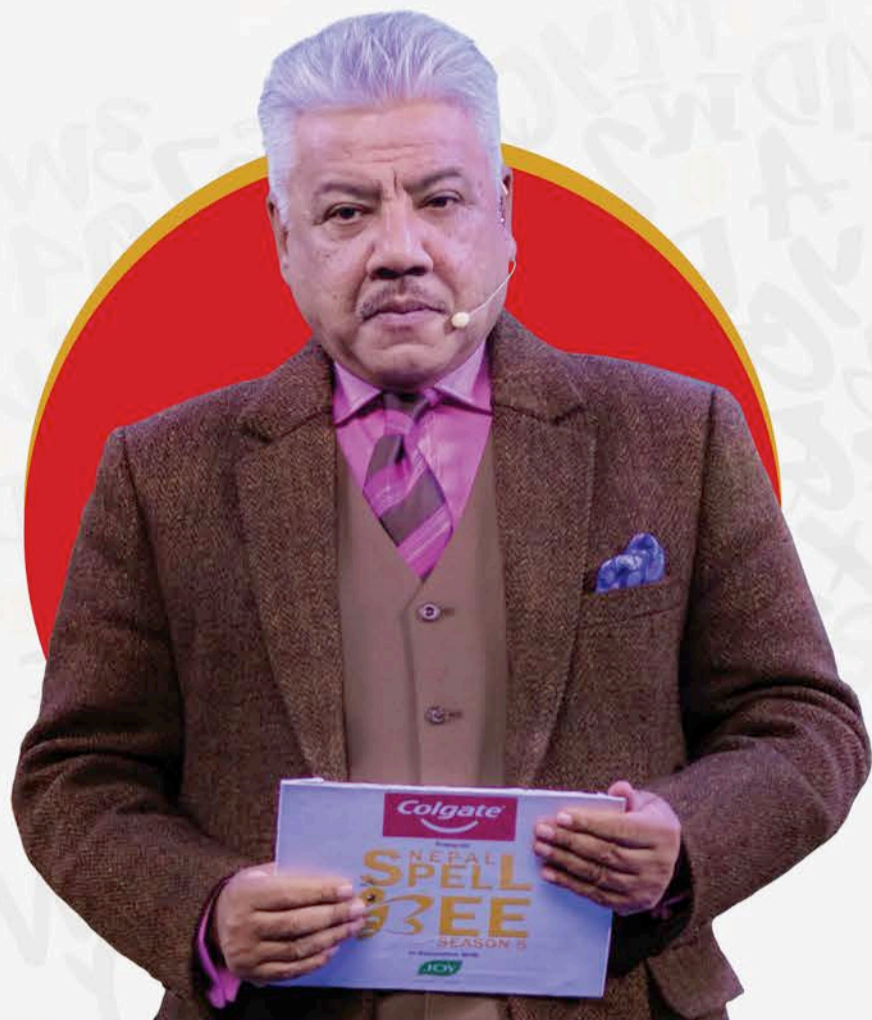
As recently as last year, many inside the White House and the Biden campaign team privately worried Harris was a liability for the campaign.

The situation has changed significantly since then, Democratic officials have said, as she stepped forward on abortion rights and courted young voters.

Some polls favour Harris
Recent polls suggest Harris could do better than Biden against Trump, the Republican candidate, although she would face a tight contest.

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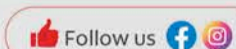
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OPINION



OUR VIEW

Easy does it

Amending the constitution is a serious matter and not something that can be done overnight.

The text of the midnight deal last Monday whereby the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML agreed to stitch together a new coalition remains hidden, giving rise to much speculation. Yet while talking about the deal, the leaders of the two parties have pointed to the necessity of a 'national consensus' government in order to address the country's pressing problems. This, they say, entails amending the nine-year-old national constitution. Even if the country's two largest parties come together, they will fall short of a two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution in the federal lower House. Had they the numbers in the lower chamber, they would have fallen short in the upper House. To amend the constitution, the ruling parties ought to have two-thirds majority in both. This is why many analysts reckon the constitution amendment is no more than an excuse to justify the toppling of the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government. That is unfortunate. The biggest architects of the national charter cannot be so cavalier when it comes to its amendment.

The other suspicion is that in pushing for constitution amendment, the two big parties want to significantly reduce the number of proportional representation seats in the two Houses. The reasoning is that the PR seats have allowed many smaller political outfits to enter parliament and to bargain for power with the big parties, thus contributing to political instability. The Congress and the UML also seemingly want to capitalise on the perception that the PR seats are mostly reserved for those close to powerful party chairs rather than for members of the marginalised and under-represented communities, as was envisioned in the constitution. Whatever the case, they should tread carefully. Despite all its flaws, the PR system has significantly increased the political representation of marginalised communities and groups and it would be dangerous to fiddle with it without their buy-in. There is also no guarantee a fully FPTP system will ensure stability. Even before the new constitution came into effect in 2015, not a single government, each one of them formed through direct elections, came close to serving out its full term. This again points to the need for broad consultations—and not a little introspection on the part of our top leaders.

A living document that is the constitution can and should be amended on a timely basis, or it becomes irrelevant. But hastily tweaking it could invite more problems than it would solve. It is interesting that many of the high-ranking Congress and UML leaders were unaware of the Monday deal even an hour before it was signed. It is thus hard to believe that the points of agreement were much discussed even inside the two parties, much less in the broader society. For far too long, the leaders of the big parties have treated the apparatus of government pretty much as their personal property. The biggest reason the new federal republican system has not functioned as intended is their sense of entitlement, lack of accountability, and paucity of faith in the system they have themselves championed in public. Unless there is a change in this mindset, no system of governance or election will yield the desired results.

Financing universities sustainably

The endowment model, while providing a comfortable financial cushion, also ensures academic autonomy.

BHOLA THAPA



Universities worldwide are facing different crises, ranging from constricting finances to dwindling student numbers and diminishing academic autonomy. Nepali universities cannot be expected to remain independent of the global and local environments. Some of the challenges they face are unique, and so they require tailor-made responses.

As the number of students opting to study abroad increases yearly, Nepali universities are scrambling to fill their seats. Recent data from the Ministry of Education show that Nepali students sent Rs104.25 billion as tuition fees to foreign universities in the first 10 months of Fiscal Year 2023-24, as per the Nepal Rashtra Bank. Such payments stood at Rs112.52 billion and Rs75.14 billion, respectively, in the same period of the previous year.

A whopping 97,000 students have obtained the no-objection certificate (NOC) for education abroad in the first nine months of FY 2023-24. A total of 110,000 and 113,000 students obtained NOC in fiscal years 2022-23 and 2021-22, respectively, a 300 percent rise in a decade, as per the ministry.

These figures are staggering. Even as they show a dangerous trend of the country's exodus of human capital and financial resources, they leave us with the question: How do Nepali universities survive? As the students leave the country in droves, universities face half-filled classrooms and depleting financial resources. For now, publicly funded universities like Tribhuvan University and Nepal Sanskrit University may not have to worry about their finances. However, self-funding universities like Kathmandu University (KU) and Pokhara University, which largely sustain on tuition fees, face an existential question as the number of students falls and their earnings plummet.

Diversifying revenue sources

For university administrators, not having to worry about financial problems is a great advantage, for one can concentrate on academics and research, the major functions of the university.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Kathmandu University faced this grueling question of long-term financial sustainability, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Technically, the university was not likely to face a financial crisis in the short run, even during the pandemic, for it had a comfortable financial cushion. But we could foresee a looming crisis in case the pandemic dragged on. We could not expect students to continue paying tuition fees if the income sources of their parents or guardians took a hit. In any case, KU generates only 60 percent of its revenue from tuition fees, while it receives about 10 percent of funding from the government. Exploring funding sources for the remaining 30 percent is a persistent challenge, as an unhindered university operation hinges on this.

Diversifying funding sources is crucial to the financial sustainability of universities, particularly those not publicly funded. It is also critical for the autonomy of academic governance. Despite having to keep an eye on the financial resources all the time, one advantage of receiving a minuscule amount of funding from the government is that universities can exercise relatively better academic freedom, ranging from faculty appointment to curriculum design and research. But how are we to diversify financial sources when the student numbers are coming down and the country's economic growth is nearly stagnant year after year?

This is where the endowment model comes in as a major funding source, even for Nepal's self-funded universities.

Endowment model

Globally, endowments form a successful model for diversifying funding sources in universities. Thousands of universities worldwide run on different kinds of endowment funds institutions and individuals provide. Usually, a portion of the earnings from the endowments is

used towards running costs or specific university projects, thus ensuring long-term financial security for the university.

The US-based Harvard University has 14,000 endowments today, with the total size exceeding \$50.7 billion. The endowments contributed \$2.2 billion to the university's operating budget in 2023 alone. Stanford University's endowment fund was valued at \$36.3 billion in 2023, with the endowment payout standing at \$1.74 billion, covering 23 percent of the university's operating expenses. Top American universities continue to tap the goodwill of donors and alumni to strengthen their financial standing. These generous endowments allow the universities to pay their faculty and staff well, fund their students' tuition and research and innovate.

Culturally, endowment is not a new concept in Nepal. The *guthi* system has been in operation for centuries, where the community chips in resources to fund initiatives that are especially relevant to community work. The Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere is the best example of communities coming together to finance their common objectives. The *guthis* established by wealthy rulers, business persons and landowners in the past helped educate a significant number of Nepalis in Indian cities like Benares and Calcutta. The Madan Puraskar Library, offering two scholarships every year for studying medicine in Calcutta, is a continuation of this culture. The Rajkivi Sanskrit School in Mathani, Mahottari and the Ramswarup Ramsagar Multiple Campus in Janakpur, Dhanusha are some examples of endowments strengthening Nepal's education system.

Public-spirited individuals who wanted to contribute to Nepal's future through education laid the financial foundation of KU in its formative years. These individuals include a busi-

nessman named Rana Bahadur Shah, who helped build the university's library and offered his mansion in Lazimpat to set up the university's offices in its initial days. As a gesture of gratitude to Shah, the university founded the Rana Bahadur Shah Gold Medal fund. The university continued to receive generous funds from individuals and institutions along the way, with notable contributions from its alumni as well as businesspersons and philanthropists, including Mohan Gopal Khetan, Gopal Rajbhandari, Juddha Bahadur Shah, Krishna KC and Prof. Bidya Nath Koirala.

Growing endowments

Acquiring endowments and making them grow requires a systemic approach to financial management. KU's efforts at organising dedicated fundraising programmes and strategically mobilising its surplus funds have been quite successful. The number of endowment funds has grown from around 12 to 53 in the past three and a half years, and the size of the fund has grown over tenfold, from around Rs60 million to Rs650 million. This growth has helped set up scholarships, fellowships, medals, awards, and educational loans for students while also strengthening the capacity of faculty and staff.

The sources of such endowments have been pretty diverse—from individuals offering money in memory of their loved ones to national and international institutions providing funds, alumni giving back to their university, and faculty transferring the earnings and savings from external research projects.

To ensure steady growth from the endowments, universities can follow the conservative route of investing in fixed deposits at "A Class" commercial banks that offer competitive interest rates and investment security. One way to utilise this scheme is to spend 50 percent of the income from interests and reinvest the remaining amount in the principal investment. However, conservative investments such as bank interests come with fluctuating returns. Diversifying the investment portfolio by investing in non-collateralised assets while devising clear guidelines and risk-hedging strategies is paramount.

The experiment with the endowment model has proved to be a significant alternative funding model for KU. This could be a blueprint for self-funding and even public universities in Nepal, especially if we can incorporate international fund management practices for sustainable operation and growth through endowments.

Thapa is Professor of Mechanical Engineering and Vice-Chancellor of Kathmandu University.

MONDAY INTERVIEW PRADEEP GYAWALI

Constitution review is certain, amendment only if needed

If the amendment process begins, it will be limited to the extent of ensuring political stability. We won't touch other aspects of the constitution.

The Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML last week reached an agreement to form a coalition government under the leadership of UML chair KP Sharma Oli. As a part of the package, they also aim to make certain changes to the constitution. The *Post's* Thira Lal Bhusal asked Pradeep Gyawali, deputy general secretary of UML, the reasons behind the coming together of the two largest parties, how they plan to run the government and to review and amend the constitution.

Many are seeing the Congress-UML alliance as something unusual. What factors brought the two largest parties together even as there is no crisis-like situation or a special task such as constitution writing?

Definitely, in normal parliamentary practice, the two largest parties don't forge an alliance to run a government. The party that gets the biggest mandate leads the government, and the other big party remains in the opposition to make the ruling force accountable. In Nepal, the country's two major forces, the Congress and the UML, have also joined hands in certain junctures for certain purposes. They worked together to make the constitution in 1990, to conduct general elections in 1999, to complete transition after the 2006 people's movement and to bring out the constitution in 2015.

We felt a need for a similar collaboration this time around. After the November 2022 elections, we saw three alliances in our parliament. At first, Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal became prime minister with our support, but he failed to abide by the agreement sincerely. He changed the coalition within a month. The subsequent alliance between the Congress and the Maoist Centre lasted for a year. He again sought the UML's support. Within four months of the March 4 deal with the UML, he started yet another gameplan to join hands with the Congress under the pretext of forming a national consensus government. It was quite unusual for the prime minister himself to instigate instability in the government.

He publicly boasted that he had a 'magical number' [32 seats in the House of Representatives]. He thought that he could employ the tactic of 'use and throw' with the two largest parties and

rule the country for the full term. He was completely indifferent to people's plight, the country's pressing issues and service delivery. This was the height of irresponsibility. So, the UML and Congress leaders concluded that the time had come to intervene to ensure political stability and service delivery and make sure public frustration doesn't get out of hand.

It is said that the UML was spooked when it learned that Prime Minister Dahal had reportedly approached the Congress for a new alliance. This reportedly happened after Dahal returned from New Delhi following Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in.

We were taken by surprise when the Congress leaders told us that the prime minister had reached out to them with a proposal to form a national consensus government. We were informed about the development from the leaders of the main opposition party. When we reached the March 4 deal with the prime minister, we thought he came to us with a commitment to course correction. Based on that, we supported him almost unconditionally. We didn't bargain while sharing ministerial portfolios and didn't talk about the prime minister's term. We had even thought of allowing Dahal to run the government for the full term if the government functioned well and people were satisfied. We hadn't even imagined that we would have to think about changing the coalition within four months.

Fortunately, the Congress leaders didn't accept the offer and instead raised critical questions about the rationale behind the proposal. Basically, the Congress didn't trust Prachanda ji [Dahal] and came to us. It concluded that Dahal didn't come with the intent of solving the country's problems but to manoeuvre between the Congress and the UML.

Besides jointly running the government, constitution amendment is another major aspect of the latest Congress-UML deal. What are the provisions the parties want to change?

There are four major objectives of this agreement. Safeguarding national interest; strengthening economy; improving governance and service



Pradeep Gyawali, deputy general secretary, CPN-UML

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

delivery; and ensuring political stability. A debate has started that some constitutional provisions are not helping maintain political stability. What we have said is that it's been almost a decade since the promulgation of this constitution. Some of its provisions are yet to be implemented. On the other hand, provincial governments complain that they have not been able to work in a full-fledged way because the federal government has still not made some laws they need. So, first, we will undertake a comprehensive review on the progress in the course of implementing the constitution and the challenges we faced in the past decade, among other things. While doing so, we will find out if there are provisions that have posed challenges in maintaining political stability and running a stable government and suggest amendments accordingly. So, it's not only about the amendment but also about review, assessment and recommendation for amendment, if there is a need. Even if the amendment process begins, it will be limited to ensuring political stability and won't touch other aspects of the statute. There is no

need to over-react. For instance, some Maoist leaders are trying to make it a political issue by describing it as a regressive move. That is wrong.

So as per the two-party deal, the statute will be reviewed but not necessarily amended?

Yes, whether to go for amendments will depend on the findings of the review. No constitution in the world is perfect. Its success largely depends on the practitioners. So, first we have to differentiate between the role of the constitution and the practitioners. It is true that our society is divided over certain provisions of our constitution. All these issues will be considered, but the fundamental features of the constitution such as democracy, inclusion and federalism won't be altered. Our priority would be to only remove hindrances in making the system more functional, people-oriented and productive.

Of late, people are debating the electoral system, provincial structure and secularism. Will these issues also be dealt with?

Federalism is a new system for us. In fact, it is still an in-the-making process in Nepal. We have to note some timelines while analysing the performance of provinces. After the provincial and federal elections in 2017, the first provincial governments were formed in 2018, and they worked for around three years in a stable way. With small cabinets, they worked genuinely to strengthen the provincial system. The wrong trends in the provinces started with the division of the then Nepal Communist Party and the fall of the NCP-led governments at the centre as well as provinces. We saw the trend of horse-trading in provinces. Small parties made unjustified bargaining for ministerial portfolios, chief ministers started splitting ministries and increasing the number of ministers in their cabinets.

Also, the November 2022 polls again gave a fragmented verdict, further augmenting the instability and anomalies at the provincial level. So, the problem is the way we are handling things more than the provincial structures. The time isn't ripe to seek an alternative to the provinces.

We included proportional representation (PR) system after long debates and discussions. Based on three general elections held after 1990, a conclusion was drawn that the first-past-the-post (FPTP) model couldn't properly represent the historically under-represented sections. The premise is still valid. The forms and modalities of the PR system might be discussed, but no one has even thought of removing the inclusive system.

Similar is the case with secularism. The spirit is to make the state patron of all religions in the country. However, some sections of society have often tried to misuse and misinterpret the new constitutional provision. They try to interpret secularism as openly allowing rampant religious conversion, and some have made it an excuse to attack the age-old Sanatan faith. For instance, if the President or prime minister visits Lumbini, gurudwara or a shrine of any other faith on certain occasions, that is taken positively, but when they visit Pashupatinath Temple, a section of people raise questions. These activities have made some people think that these attacks on our Sanatan faith are taking place because of the secular system.

Some experts believe the problem of fragmented mandate can be addressed by increasing the threshold required for a political party to be eligible to get PR seats, which can be done by amending laws. Will the Congress-UML alliance opt for this?

Yes, this is one feasible option. I am in favour of this. As per the existing provision, a political party can secure seats under the PR category by securing 3 percent votes in the federal parliament and 1.5 percent votes in provincial assemblies. If a political organisation doesn't even represent 5 or 7 or 10 percent of the population, what can they contribute to the country? You do politics to represent a sizable population and get a public mandate. Otherwise, the presence of such groups would only promote unreasonable bargaining and instigate instability in governments. This can be one of the agenda of the discussion between the two parties.

The Congress and the UML are historical rival forces in Nepali politics. How can the two work together in government?

It is true that the Congress and the UML are the two major competitors of this country. But we have some converging factors. First, we both believe in a broader democratic framework. Sometimes, the Congress may give more emphasis on liberal values while we may push for more socialism-oriented programmes. But the common ground is democratic values. We also have the experience of successfully carrying out certain tasks jointly. We may have some friction but we also have experience of managing bitter intra-party fighting as well as inter-party rivalry.

How can a government without the Maoist Centre and some other parties be called a consensus government?

We have to wait for that. Leaders of political parties that fiercely criticise the government also join the Cabinet under one or other pretext. Some political parties seemingly cannot exist without being in the government.

For a longer version of the interview log on to kathmandupost.com.

Nepal epidemic control body urges health workers to cancel leave

Officials warn of potential outbreaks of waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to floods in the coming days.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JULY 7

With monsoon havoc sweeping across the country, the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division has urged health workers to avoid taking leave during the season.

Officials have warned that health facilities could be overwhelmed by patients in the coming days as outbreaks of waterborne and vector-borne diseases are expected, as floodwaters have contaminated most of the drinking water sources.

"We have requested the provincial and local health authorities not to grant leave to health workers during the monsoon season," said Dr Yadu Chandra Ghimire, director of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. "Health agencies have been cautioned about the looming risk of outbreaks of waterborne and vector-borne diseases in the coming days."

Outbreaks of water- and vector-borne diseases are expected as floodwaters mix into drinking water sources.

Torrential rainfall started Friday wreaking havoc in various places across the country. At least 14 people have died in disaster-related incidents—nine in landslides and five in floods—since Friday, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority. Officials said 18 others have been injured, and four people are missing.

Since the monsoon entered the country on June 10, at least 43 people have died in landslides and flood-related incidents. Lightning strikes killed as many as 19 people during this period.

The monsoon season in Nepal is a time of epidemics during which thousands of people across the country become infected with water-borne and vector-borne diseases.

The persistent rainfall that started on Friday not only destroyed houses and inundated settlements but also contaminated drinking water sources.

Health officials warned that health facilities could witness an uptick in the number of viral fever cases, and waterborne diseases—diarrhoea, dysentery, food poisoning, and snake bites—in the coming days.

"We have also requested central hospitals and medical colleges to be prepared for help during disease out-

breaks," said Ghimire. "As we don't have enough doctors and health workers to deploy to control the outbreaks, we have to seek help from big hospitals and medical colleges."

Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said that they have been raising awareness through all available means to inform people of the risks.

"Essential medicines have been stockpiled, health workers have been asked to be ready for deployment to affected areas, anti-snake venom has been supplied to health facilities," said Dr Prakash Budhathoki, spokesperson at the Health Ministry. "As of Sunday evening, no outbreaks have been reported."

According to health experts, sources of drinking water generally become contaminated in disaster-hit areas, and people displaced by natural disasters become highly vulnerable to infections with waterborne and vector-borne diseases.

Every year, thousands of people get infected with vector-borne diseases such as dengue, kala-azar, malaria, and scrub typhus during this period.

Last year, at least 20 persons died, and more than 52,000 were infected by the virus, which had spread to all 77 districts. According to data provided by the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, at least 1,432 people from 73 districts have been infected with the dengue virus since January this year. Among the 73 districts that reported dengue outbreaks, Kathmandu has the highest number of cases: 159.

Public health experts say reported cases could be just the tip of the iceberg, as around 80 percent of those infected are asymptomatic.

Likewise, snakebite incidents and resulting deaths are also common during the season, but the phenomenon, which experts dub "a lurking invisible crisis", remains grossly neglected.

"Incidents of snakebites have started to surge over the last few weeks," said Dr Rajiv Jha, director at Provincial Health Directorate of Madhesh Province. "Along with the surge in waterborne and vector-borne diseases in the coming days, we have anticipated a rise in snakebite cases."

Doctors say the only ways to prevent deaths from waterborne diseases, including diarrhoea, are to raise awareness and ensure safe drinking water.

They say a combination of careful surveys, ensuring safe drinking water, maintaining sanitation and hygiene, social mobilisation and treatment are required to contain the spread of the diarrhoeal infection.



People shop litchi and green vegetables from street vendors at Shankhamul in Kathmandu recently.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

UML demands Dahal resign immediately, fearing possible maneuverings

Dahal has decided to go for a floor test on July 12, his fifth confidence vote since assuming power following the elections.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JULY 7

The CPN-UML parliamentary party on Sunday demanded that the prime minister step down immediately, arguing that the country is facing serious natural disasters and a minority government cannot make crucial decisions.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is set to face the House of Representatives on July 12 after two of his coalition partners, the UML and the Janata Samajbadi Party, withdrew their support to his government.

UML chair KP Sharma Oli has got the backing of the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the House, to become the next prime minister. UML leaders have been urging him to resign as soon as possible.

"Even a minute is important for the country," UML Chief Whip Mahesh Bartaula told the Post. "Why should we wait for five more days?"

On July 2, the UML formally requested the prime minister to resign by the evening of July 3. The party's secretariat meeting had called Dahal to step down to allow for new government formation in accordance with Article 76 (2) of the constitution.

Sunday's parliamentary party meeting reiterated its earlier demand.

"Our first demand is that the prime minister resign immediately," Bartaula said. "If he does not resign, we will vote against him on July 12."

On March 4, the UML and the CPN (Maoist Centre) banded with fringe parties to form the government under Dahal's leadership, ousting the Nepali Congress as the chief coalition partner. Nearly four months later, the Congress and the UML forged an agreement to form a new government at midnight on July 1. On July 3, the UML, the largest party in the coalition, withdrew its support for the Dahal government, throwing it into the minority.

The upcoming floor test will be Prime Minister Dahal's fifth since he assumed office after the November 2022 election. In his latest confidence vote on May 20, Dahal won the backing of 157 members in the 275-strong House, where the UML has 77 members and Dahal's Maoist Centre has 32. Along with the UML, seven lawmakers of the Janata Samajbadi Party have also withdrawn their support for Dahal's government.

Currently, the Dahal government only has the support of 63 lawmakers, including 21 from the Rastriya Swatantra Party and 10 from the CPN (Unified Socialist).

As per Article 100 (2) of the consti-

tion, the prime minister must now secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days to stay in power, which is unlikely given the current political situation.

In a hung parliament, smaller parties often have a big say in government formation. Therefore, the UML does not want to take any chances by letting Dahal remain in his position for long. A political observer says this could be the reason why the second largest party is insisting on his resignation.

"The UML might have thought that if he stays in office for long, Dahal could manipulate politics in his favor. Therefore, they want to unseat him as soon as possible," Mumaram Khanal, a political observer, told the Post.

Maoist Centre leaders argue that since the Dahal government was formed as per Article 76 (2) of the constitution, the new government formation process would now move on to Article 76 (3).

If the government is formed as per Article 76 (3), the parliamentary party leader of the largest party in the House will be appointed the new prime minister. This will pave the way for Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba to be the next prime minister.

As per the Congress-UML deal, Oli will lead a new 'national consensus'

government for a year and a half, before handing over the reins to Deuba until the next elections.

Maoist lawmakers told the Post that the prime minister would not resign to serve anyone's (meaning UML) interest.

"The prime minister will proceed according to the constitutional provision," Lekh Nath Dahal said. "It is a situation in which the parties that supported the government have withdrawn their support. The government still has power to make major decisions."

The Maoist lawmaker alleges that UML leaders were demanding Dahal's resignation fearing that the government may launch an investigation into the Giri Bandhu Tea Estate and the fake Bhutanese refugees scams.

"UML chief Oli is accused of policy corruption in the Giri Bandhu Tea Estate land swap case," he said. "And his brother-in-law is accused in the Bhutanese refugees scam."

UML lawmaker Raghuji Pant rubbishes lawmaker Dahal's claim.

"If they have the evidence of our party engaging in any wrongdoing, let them start an investigation against our leader," Pant told the Post. "If not, a prime minister whose support has dipped far below the majority mark should not buy the time. He needs to resign as soon as possible."

How climate change is taking a toll on women's menstruation cycles

Research shows menstruation is either delayed or occurs much earlier than expected in countries most vulnerable to climate change.

ALEEZEH FATIMAH
ISLAMABAD, JULY 7

Research shows menstruation is either delayed or occurs much earlier than expected in countries most vulnerable to climate change.

My sister got her first period at the tender age of seven and a half. Not prepared for the pain that comes with menstruation, the mental and physical exhaustion took the best of her. A year later, her period mysteriously stopped and never occurred again until the age of 12.

Menarche, the first menstrual period in a female adolescent, usually occurs between ages 10 and 16, with an average onset of 12.4 years. It often happens unexpectedly and is typically painless. However, the National Institute of Health (NIH) has recently found that menstruation is either delayed or occurs much earlier than expected in countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Pakistan is among the top-ranking countries that are bearing the brunt of this global crisis. Over the past 50 years, the country's annual mean temperature has risen by about 0.5°C, with the number of heatwaves increasing nearly five-fold.

In May 2022, when temperatures across the country broke a 60-year record, 16-year-old Fariha Atiq — who started menstruating at the age of nine — witnessed possibly the worst period of her life.

"I was completely unequipped to deal with my period. Somehow I coped with it, but as time passed, the seasonal changes worsened my cramps. I remember in the summer of 2022, from April to August I couldn't move my legs during my menstrual cycle," she told Dawn.com.

Fariha's mother, Mrs Atiq, took her to various gynaecologists but all of them described what the teenager was experiencing as 'normal', which was far from the pain she endured. Mild to moderate pain before and during menstruation is typical, but

severe cramps can stem from various factors.

Mrs Atiq continued her search for a gynaecologist who could ascertain the reason for her daughter's pain. Eventually, she found Dr Junaid Ansari, an obstetrics expert at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Karachi. He explained that the pain was caused by elevated levels of cortisol — a stress hormone influenced by temperature.

Cortisol increases with rising temperatures, contributing to dysmenorrhoea, which nearly immobilised the teenager two years back.

Link between hormones and rising temperatures

For most women, menstruation is typically 'painless'; some, however, experience severe cramps. This is a symptom of dysmenorrhoea—pain during the menstrual cycle—and occurs due to the release of cortisol.

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Cortisol is a hormone that is released during stressful situations and plays several roles in the female anatomy. It regulates blood sugar levels, metabolism, and blood pressure, and acts as an anti-inflammatory agent. Moreover, the hormone influences the menstrual cycle and prepares the body for pregnancy.

"The primary cause of a prolonged or delayed period can be the release of cortisol, which changes from season to season. For example, in winter, the release is higher, which disrupts the cycle," Dr Ansari explained to Dawn.com.

The doctor highlighted, however, that he had observed the hormone

peak during summers due to intense heat. "Very recently, I came across a 12-year-old girl with a decent body mass index, who wasn't able to move due to extreme cramps, that too during May and July," he shared.

"After recommending a cortisol blood test, we discovered that her cortisol level was 30 mcg/dL, significantly above the normal range of 14-20 mcg/dL for someone her age. We opted to monitor the levels and were surprised to find them returning to normal by the end of August following rainfall.

"While I continue my research, I am convinced that severe climate change is causing disruptions in menstrual cycles," Dr Ansari added.

Extreme stress can disrupt the working of glands that control hormones such as cortisol and are responsible for the release of oestrogen needed for female reproductive characteristics.

Researchers at Poznan University of Medical Sciences in Poland have identified seasonal patterns in cortisol levels among female medical students. The study involved testing students twice in winter and twice in summer, with saliva samples collected every two hours over 24-hour periods to measure cortisol and inflammation markers.

Participants also completed lifestyle questionnaires detailing their sleep habits, diet, and physical activity levels. Unlike previous studies conducted in varied home environments, this research found higher cortisol levels during the summer sessions, while inflammation levels remained consistent across seasons. This further strengthens the argument that rising temperature has an impact on menstrual cycles.

(Un)common conditions

Contrary to popular opinion, dysmenorrhoea is not a common condition.

"Most girls who come to me with cases of severe cramps are told by gynaecologists that cramps are nor-

mal, which is not true," Dr Asifa Sofia of the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital told Dawn.com.

"This condition has developed in the last five years, and most patients I attend, the girls go through a painful period through winter," she said.

Primary dysmenorrhoea, the doctor explained, causes pain before and during menstruation. On the other hand, periods that become painful in the later stages could indicate secondary dysmenorrhoea, which is often linked to conditions such as endometriosis or uterine fibroids that affect the uterus or pelvic organs.

"This usually occurs due to hormonal changes," she highlighted, adding that painful periods and disruptions in blood flow were directly connected to erratic weather patterns in the region.

Pakistan is among the top-ranking countries bearing the brunt of this global crisis.

"I work with women from both urban and rural areas. One thing I have observed, which is a common pattern, is that with fluctuating temperatures, the sizes of follicles are affected, which in turn impacts the oestrogen levels," Dr Sofia said.

The follicle is a small, fluid-filled sac in the ovary that contains one immature egg. Disruptions in size can alter hormones that regulate puberty, menstrual cycle, pregnancy, bone strength and other functions of the female body.

Sabiha, one of Dr Sofia's patients from Thar, is being treated for an irregular period cycle. In May 2021, she started experiencing severe abdominal pain during menstruation. Like several other women, the 24-year-old initially brushed off the pain until

one day, while working around the house, she fainted.

In Thar, May and June mark the hottest months of the year with temperatures reaching up to 122°F (50°C).

"After that fall, my period has never been normal. I either bleed for 12 days straight or I don't bleed at all. Irrespective of that, the pain stays the same," she said. When asked if she had experienced such cramps before she began menstruating, Sabiha replied in the negative.

Sabiha is one such case. Dr Sofia told Dawn.com that she had treated patients after the 2022 floods whose period cycles took a hit from the massive disaster. "Today, even the slightest change in temperatures either alters their follicle size or their oestrogen levels which is alarming," she pointed out.

Erratic patterns

In the past five years, Pakistan has experienced both intense heat and cold. Irregular periods aren't limited to summer when temperatures rise rapidly, but can also occur in winters.

"I experienced intense cramps last year which made me scream, especially from the end of December to the middle of January," said Arwa, 22. "I clocked my cycle and consulted a doctor, who asked me to get my melatonin checked."

"When I took the test towards the end of January, it was very low," she recalled. Surprisingly, Arwa's pain vanished by February, with regular menstruation cycles until April. But the pain returned in May, much more intense this time.

Aniqa Sajid, a mother of two, narrated going through a similar ordeal on the first and second days of her period.

"This is new to me because it has been happening for the last two years and it only happens during winters. Initially, it was just pain and I was able to move around, but with time... within six months it got so bad that even a couple of painkillers couldn't help," she said.

According to the NIH, the absence of natural sunlight during winter can disrupt serotonin and melatonin levels — which also play a part in regulating the menstrual cycle — in the body. This hormonal imbalance can lead to heavy periods. Additionally, when the temperatures decrease, blood vessels compress, leaving a narrower pathway for blood flow and contributing to heavier menstruation.

Dr Tahira Masood, a gynaecologist at the Liaquat National Hospital, also told Dawn.com that menstrual cramps can be intensified during winter.

"Dysmenorrhoea is often caused by the secretion of hormone-like substances called prostaglandins. Cold weather can trigger an increase in these substances, leading to more painful cramps."

"The constriction of blood vessels in cold weather can exacerbate menstrual cramps. Many women report more severe cramps during winter, indicating that this is a common experience," she explained.

Until a few years ago, menstruation was a taboo topic, hardly ever discussed in public. While this has improved over time, especially in urban areas, conversations on period pain and women's health are still minimal.

As Pakistan scrambles to tackle the climate crisis, it is important to understand that this cannot be done without addressing gender equity, especially the underlying barriers that cause women to be disproportionately affected by natural disasters.

"Most women I come across have no clue that the changes they have been enduring in their menstrual cycles occur because of climate change," Dr Tahira said, stressing the need for awareness.

She added that women's health could not be compromised and in the long run, sustainable changes such as temperature-dependent tampons, hormonal medicines and other natural resources that keep the body running need to be normalised.

MONEY

| FOREX | |
|-------------------|--------|
| US Dollar | 133.88 |
| Euro | 145.1 |
| Pound Sterling | 171.5 |
| Swiss Franc | 149.39 |
| Australian Dollar | 90.37 |
| Canadian Dollar | 98.15 |
| Singapore Dollar | 99.27 |
| Japanese Yen (10) | 8.33 |
| Chinese Yuan | 18.42 |
| Saudi Arab Riyal | 35.69 |
| Qatari Riyal | 36.72 |
| Thai Bhat | 3.67 |
| UAE Dhiram | 36.45 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 28.43 |
| Korean Won (100) | 9.72 |

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

| SHARES | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Nepse (in percent) | 2,140.97 _{pts} 1.00% |
| HIGHEST GAINERS | |
| CHDC | 5.25 |
| NMFBS | 5.09 |
| NIFRA | 5.03 |
| KBLD86 | 5.02 |
| NRN | 4.8 |
| SAMAJ | 4.73 |
| MODERATE GAINERS | |
| LSL | 0.12 |
| USLB | 0.12 |
| EBLD85 | 0.12 |
| GRLBS | 0.11 |
| AHL | 0.08 |
| NJLCL | 0.07 |
| MODERATE LOSERS | |
| NMBD2 | -0.09 |
| JSSJCL | -0.08 |
| JALPA | -0.08 |
| ULHC | -0.03 |
| CBLD88 | -0.02 |
| SABSL | -0.01 |
| HIGHEST LOSERS | |
| MKJC | -1.0 |
| GFCL | -6.62 |
| ICFC | -4.18 |
| USHEC | -3.9 |
| HURJA | -3.59 |
| CFCL | -3.41 |

| BULLION | | PRICE PER TOLA |
|-----------|--|----------------|
| Fine Gold | | Rs 145,400 |
| Silver | | Rs 1,890 |

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Rakura unveils eco-friendly teabags, new varieties



KATHMANDU: Rakura has launched its next generation of tea products. The company has introduced its revolutionary Magic Knot Teabags, using the world's first state-of-the-art Tandem Air-knotted technology. Featuring the latest non-heat sealed, double-chambered teabag design, the teabag boasts of being amongst the world's first and Nepal's only fully plastic and glue-free teabag. The magic knot teabag also includes new innovations such as the world's first certified organic, unbleached thread—assuring non-GMO cotton and no harmful chemicals, together with the updated easy-hold tags that are more comfortable to hold and are made of food-grade board and ink, the company said in a statement. The company has also created 21 new varieties of teas while also improving its existing teas and blends, achieving a tea collection that is amongst the biggest in the world. “Given our history of always breaking new ground for the Nepalese tea industry, we’ve again initiated a new era for Nepal’s tea,” said Neeraj Rathi, managing director of Rakura. “We’re calling our next-generation products the most healthful and eco-friendly in the world because there is no other tea product in the world that has all of our innovations in a single pack.”

Taiwan says no timetable for launching digital currency

TAIPEI: Taiwan's central bank said on Sunday that it has no timetable for launching a digital currency, warning the process will be “huge and complex”, but it will hold public hearings on the matter next year to spread knowledge. Taiwan's central bank has been working on a pilot for a government-run digital currency, to allow people to use a digital wallet and make payments without using a debit or credit card. (Reuters)

Algeria and Italy sign \$455 million agriculture deal

ALGIERS: Algeria and Italy on Saturday signed a 420-million-euro deal (\$455 million) for an agricultural project in the North African country, the Algerian agriculture ministry said in a statement. The scheme, which Italian officials called their country's largest agricultural investment in the southern Mediterranean, covers 36,000 hectares (89,000 acres) in Algeria's Timimoun province. It will produce wheat, lentils and beans, among other foods, in the hopes of increasing Algerian non-hydrocarbon exports, officials said during the agreement ceremony. (AFP)

Floods, landslides push veggie prices to new highs

Most retail prices crossed Rs100 per kg in two days. Prices may rise again with large areas inundated, and landslides affecting the supply chain.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JULY 7

The vegetable supply chain to Kathmandu Valley has been disrupted by the inundation of large areas of standing crops in the current wave of floods and landslides across the country, pushing prices to new highs in the last two days.

The torrential rains, which started on Friday, have killed 14 people and affected thousands of households, according to the authorities. Most of the highways have been affected by landslides. A vast swathe of agricultural land has been inundated.

According to the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Market Development Board, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, cow pea (long), French bean, soybean green, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, pointed gourd, snake gourd, smooth gourd, squash, okra, and leafy vegetables are currently among the most expensive kitchen ingredients in the Valley.

Traders say the prices, which were already expensive, increased overnight.

Retail prices of most vegetables have crossed Rs100 per kg within two days, said Shanta Adhikari, owner of Shanta Tarkari Pasal in Balkot. “I was buying tomatoes for Rs1,000 per crate (23 kg) till Friday. Today [Sunday], the price nearly doubled to Rs1,900 per crate.”

Adhikari said the tomato retail price was hovering around Rs70-75 per kg until Friday and has now reached Rs100 per kg. As the Bhaktapur area has been flooded and inundated, the price of leafy vegetables has reached Rs100 per kg, from Rs70 per kg three days ago.

The wholesale price of tomato big (Nepali) at the Kalimati market, the country's largest fruits and vegetable wholesale venue, has increased by 26.67 percent to Rs95 per kg. Similarly, the price of tomatoes (local) has



Many vegetables ready to be sent to the market have been battered by rain.

increased by 211.26 percent to Rs55 per kg, while the price of tomato small (tunnel) has risen by 186.72 percent to Rs65 per kg.

Traders at Kalimati said that the wholesale price of all seasonal vegetables has risen as the rainfall has inundated crop fields and affected road transport.

Adhikari said French beans, which she sold at Rs60-80 per kg on Friday, now cost Rs100 per kg.

Similarly, smooth gourd, which she sold at Rs70-75 per kg, now costs Rs100, and cauliflower has reached Rs120 per kg. Capsicum, too, has become expensive. It costs Rs140 per kg.

“Even the eggplant, which cost Rs50 per kg, has hit Rs80-85 per kg,” she said.

The wholesale price of all three varieties of potatoes—red, Indian, and Mude—at the Kalimati market has increased within a week. The price of

potato red has increased by 2.18 percent to Rs62.33 per kg, potato red (India) by 10.32 percent to Rs57 per kg, and potato red (Mude) by 3.92 percent to Rs53 per kg.

The wholesale price of cabbage has sharply increased by 62.63 percent to Rs45 per kg, eggplant long by 57.14 percent to Rs55 per kg, and eggplant round by 36.36 percent to Rs75 per kg.

The long cowpea price has increased by 44.44 percent to Rs65 per kg,

the French bean by 76.92 percent to Rs115 per kg, and the French bean (rajma) by 27.27 percent to Rs140 per kg in wholesale.

Seasonal soybean green wholesale price has increased by 26.32 percent to Rs120 per kg.

The wholesale price of bitter gourd has sharply increased by 111.11 percent to Rs95 per kg, while the price of bottle gourd has risen by 66.67 percent to Rs75 per kg.

The wholesale price of pointed gourds has increased by 28.57 percent to Rs45 per kg, snake gourds by 22.22 percent to Rs55 per kg, and smooth gourds by 36.36 percent to Rs75 per kg.

The wholesale price of squash has increased by 36.36 percent to Rs75 per kg, and the price of okra has also gone up by 36.36 percent to Rs75 per kg.

Seasonal cucumber (local) wholesale price has increased by 68.42 percent to Rs160 per kg.

“The constant rainfall has hit vegetables ready to be shipped to the market. So it is predictable that the prices will go higher in the coming days,” said Binay Shrestha, information officer at the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Market Board.

Shrestha said the supply of fresh vegetables in Kathmandu has also slowed down. “Our market received 600-650 tonnes of vegetables daily during this time, but we are receiving hardly 500 tonnes now.”

Adhikari said she has been selling stale vegetables because she has not received sufficient fresh supplies.

Currently, the Kalimati market receives seasonal vegetables from the districts neighbouring Kathmandu Valley such as Makawanpur, Dhading, and Kavre, besides a few districts from the Tarai like Chitwan and Sarlahi.

“Despite being kitchen essentials, when prices cross Rs100 per kg, people tend to buy vegetables less,” Adhikari said. “As a result, business in the shops and market also slows down.”

‘Not the end of the world’, says data scientist on the big issues

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, JULY 7

Humanity has made great strides in recent decades: air is cleaner; poverty, deforestation and childhood mortality have fallen; gasoline cars—and maybe coal—are on the way out.

This optimistic take on the state of affairs may be startling to some, but not Hannah Ritchie, a Scottish data scientist whose first book lets the facts speak for themselves.

“We just are unaware of how bad the past was,” Ritchie told AFP from Edinburgh. “People are just unaware that at least half of kids died, that diseases were rife, that most people lived in poverty, that most of the world were hungry.”

Her book, “Not the End of the World”, presents an evidence-rich counterpoint to the view that everything is going in the wrong direction, and offers possible approaches to the burning challenges of our time.

That also means climate change, a problem that Ritchie—who is lead

researcher at the Our World in Data website based out of Oxford University—is careful not to understate.

“If you skew too far in one direction, I don’t actually think you’re telling the true story. We need to be clear-eyed about the problem in front of us,” she said. “That’s actually not useful—to deny it, or downplay it, or not be serious about it. But at the same time, you also need to focus on solutions, so we actually drive progress forward.”

Those solutions are not always obvious, Ritchie said, and focus can be misguided when it comes to choosing what personal action to take in aid of the planet.

Ritchie pointed to the tendency in rich countries to hype behaviours that have little real impact—such as recycling or ensuring televisions are not left on stand-by mode—while continuing to drive, fly and eat meat.

Assuming everything “natural” is automatically good can also mask some inconvenient realities, she added. Huddling around a campfire can produce a sense of closeness to nature, but

burning wood belches out smoke harmful to humans and the planet.

“What looks sustainable is the natural cow in a green field eating grass. But actually, when you do the numbers on this, the meat substitute burger is vastly, vastly better on almost any environmental metric compared to the cows,” she said.

An advocate of lab-grown meat, nuclear power and GMO, Ritchie does not relish being contrarian on tackling environmental problems. “I don’t take delight in being provocative. I just care about the truth,” she said.

Ritchie’s data-driven conclusions can run counter to the conventional wisdom about how to save the planet.

But they can be illuminating, identifying areas where resources might be better spent elsewhere. For example, reducing the amount of plastic bags or bottles consumed in Europe might seem a good idea on paper. But hardly any of the plastic in the sea originates from Europe, with most flowing from Asia, which does not have the same rigorous waste management schemes in place.

Indian drugmakers seek government tax reliefs

REUTERS
HYDERABAD, JULY 7

India’s pharmaceutical companies are hoping for tax incentives and financial assistance for research on innovative drugs as Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government readies a federal finance budget likely to be presented in July.

The upcoming budget would be Modi’s first major policy announcement in his third term as prime minister. Indian drug manufacturers must focus on developing complex drugs beyond the usual generic variety if the country is to continue being renowned for being the “pharmacy of the world” for its affordable medicines, experts say.

“If the Indian government can give some income tax exemptions for 5-10 years for any new molecule developed in India...that can pull innovation to grassroot level...companies will start investing in innovation,” Bharat Biotech’s Chairman Krishna Ella told Reuters on the sidelines of an event in Hyderabad on Friday.

Bharat Biotech developed India’s

first indigenous Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin. India, whose pharmaceutical market is expected to be valued at \$130 billion by the end of the decade, is the world’s third largest manufacturer of drugs by volume after the United States and China and is a hub of generic drug manufacturers.

Generic drugs are cheaper versions of brand-name drugs.

In March, research firm Bernstein said that India needs to create a domestic market where innovative drugs can be profitable at the right price. “Spending millions on clinical trials with no pricing power is not a business they [pharma companies] want to be in,” Bernstein said.

The firm also said insurance coverage for novel drugs and harmonising regulatory standards for manufacturing and clinical trials will be required for fostering innovation.

India has offered incentives since 2020 to spur the manufacturing of a broad range of products from drones to drugs in the country. But manufacturers of novel drugs are not eligible for the incentives yet.

Kazakhstan’s secret city sets sights on becoming seaside resort

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PRIOZERSK (KAZAKHSTAN), JULY 7

From the roof of his abandoned hotel, Alexei Vereshchagin remained certain that tourists would one day sip cocktails up there as they enjoyed the lakeside view of Priozersk—a former secret city in central Kazakhstan.

Due to a lack of investment, Vereshchagin has been renovating the hotel alone—including putting in new windows in each of the 150 rooms, one by one.

This mammoth task is likely to take years. The hotel’s former Cyrillic-lettered sign saying “Hotel Russia” has been removed and is now gathering dust on the roof alongside a rusty portrait of Vladimir Lenin.

“I want there to be a beautiful hotel in the centre of the city, like in the Soviet era. So I am restoring it, little by little,” recounted Vereshchagin, a Soviet Army veteran.

Once the hotel is renovated, ordinary tourists will be able to stay near Lake Balkhash’s shores with its “magnificent views”, Vereshchagin said.

The development of a thriving tourism sector in Priozersk would mark a dramatic change of fortune for the once-closed city, long unmarked on maps because of secretive military sites.

The Sary-Shagan missile range was built in 1956 to test anti-ballistic weapons systems, and a portion of the range is still leased by the Russian government, Priozersk’s mayor Mansur Akhmetov told AFP.

Walking around the town of 15,000, reminders of its Cold War heyday are everywhere.

Replicas of the S-75 surface-to-air missiles tested in Priozersk have been placed in the city centre and at its entrance, along with fading posters praising the “glory of the anti-missile shield of the Fatherland”.

Several sites dotted across the sprawling testing range on an arid steppe have been abandoned, and are now guarded by the likes of resident Ivan Sabitov.



A picture taken on June 17 shows beachgoers and tourists on a beach of a spa in Priozersk, the former secret city on the shores of Lake Balkhash in central Kazakhstan.

Sabitov, a Kazakh civilian, now whiles away the time watching over empty missile silos, dismantled radars and rocket fairings with his dog.

“These Soviet installations are destroyed, but other bases are still active,” said the 61-year-old with a weathered face.

Russian troops from the Strategic Missile

Forces—which helps manage the Kremlin’s nuclear arsenal—are still stationed in the area and sometimes swim in Lake Balkhash in the evening with their families.

Russia claims to have “infrastructure developed around Priozersk to test strategic defence equipment”, including intercontinental ballistic

missiles. Despite the presence of Russian bases, Priozersk’s mayor is trying to transform the city into a seaside resort.

This project is in line with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s desire to develop the country’s tourism sector, which represents just 3.2 percent of its GDP.

“We are going to redevelop the entire coastline, so that pedestrians can walk along it. We also plan to build hotels and organise efforts to clean the beaches,” said Akhmetov of his ambitious plans. Priozersk is already home to a smattering of small hotels that mostly host fishermen and a trickle of tourists during the first days of summer.

“Even if the town seems partly abandoned, Lake Balkhash is magnificent. I enjoy the warm water and the sand on the beach,” said Olga Ryapolova, a Russian tourist from Siberia who “hopes to come back” to Priozersk soon.

Upon closer inspection, the picturesque lake contrasts with the desolation elsewhere. A disused cement factory still stands near the lake’s shores, which Mayor Akhmetov hopes to one day demolish.

But on the only road leading to the end of the peninsula, stands a new hotel: “The Golden Sands”. This four-star spa was built in 2016 and has become a welcome source of jobs, with its 120 employees.

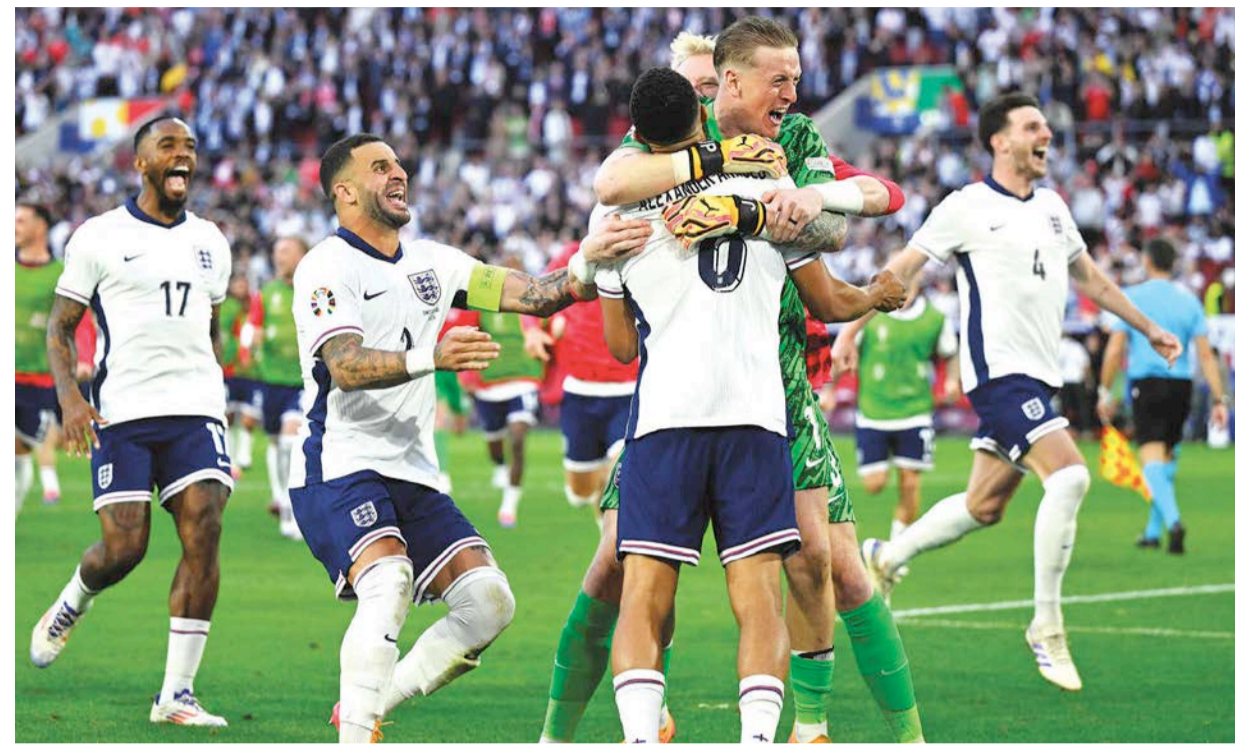
“In Priozersk, jobs are scarce, and mainly linked to the army. My mother is a soldier; I was a police officer,” said the spa’s receptionist Aizhan Musina.

“But my salary [around 250 euros] was too small, so I came to work here,” Musina said, adding that she now makes roughly 370 euros (\$400) a month.

Musina was born in Priozersk when the city was still sealed off from the public. She has long been waiting for her hometown to open up to tourists. “I hope that our city will gain fame, and that people will know that we have such a beautiful spa,” Musina told AFP.

England, the new penalty kings, overcome the boredom

The Three Lions, littered with penalty pain at major tournaments, found redemption after beating Switzerland 5-3 in penalties after the match was level at 1-1 after extra time.



The England team celebrate their quarter-finals penalty shootout win against Switzerland at the Duesseldorf Arena on Saturday.

REUTERS
DUESSELDORF, JULY 7

England fans woke up on Sunday not quite sure whether to celebrate a remarkably confident shootout performance that sent them into the Euro 2024 semi-finals or lament another display of caution and inertia by their players and manager.

On the profit side of the ledger was a shootout that should, finally, banish the folk memory of all the penalty pain that preceded it since the first of many defeats by West Germany in the 1990 World Cup semi-finals.

Cole Palmer, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka, Ivan Toney and Trent Alexander-Arnold all looked as if they would score, and all did so, expertly.

It should not have come as a surprise as Palmer, Toney and Saka are all regular and hugely impressive penalty takers for their clubs, while Bellingham and Alexander-Arnold are among the sweetest strikers of a ball in the game.

With goalkeeper Jordan Pickford going through the full repertoire of "taking control" before saving Manuel Akanji's weak effort, it was an exemplar of how to go about a shootout.

Factoring in a Nations League playoff, also against Switzerland, England have now won three of their last four

shootouts under Southgate, having lost six of their seven before that.

They have also now reached the semi-final in three of the last four tournaments—a remarkable achievement given that they had previously managed four in their entire history.

England now have a very winnable game against the Netherlands, who have stumbled and scrapped their way into the last four, with the possibility of a third major final appearance and first on foreign soil tantalisingly close.

And yet, behind the singing and dancing, looms the uncomfortable truth that England have got this far largely playing very poorly, certainly in attack.

Their defence has been very good, with every opponent generally kept at long range, but despite boasting an extraordinary array of talent in their ranks, England have been nothing short of boring.

On Saturday, Saka's 80th-minute equaliser was their first shot on target, just as Bellingham's extraordinary equaliser against Slovakia was, in the 95th minute.

The average world ranking of the teams they have beaten—Serbia, Denmark, Slovenia, Slovakia and Switzerland—is 35, yet, other than in fleeting patches and moments of individual brilliance, never have now fifth-ranked England looked a

dominant team. The massed fans behind Pickford's goal could hardly believe their eyes, having long been reduced to near silence by the frankly dull fare they were being expected to encourage.

Southgate was widely pilloried for bringing on Toney with one minute to go in the Slovakia match but he appeared wedded to his starting 11 again on Saturday, making a triple change in the 76th minute only after going behind.

For all the problems, however, England are still there, while Germany, Italy, Belgium and Portugal et al are not, and that's a scenario the fans would have gobbled up at the start of the tournament, however it has been achieved.

| EURO 2024 QUARTER-FINALS RESULTS | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--|
| Netherlands | 2-1 | Turkey | |
| Stefan de Vrij 70' | | Samet Akaydin 35' | |
| Mert Muldur 76' (OG) | | | |
| England | 1-1 | Switzerland | |
| Bukayo Saka 80' | | Breel Embolo 75' | |
| England win 5-3 on penalties. | | | |
| SEMI-FINALS | | | |
| Spain | July 10, 00:45 | France | |
| Netherlands | July 11, 00:45 | England | |

Winger Cody Gakpo's goal drive takes Netherlands to last four

The 25-year-old forward has been the Dutch lifeline in Euros with three goals in five games.

REUTERS
BERLIN, JULY 7

Netherlands desperately needed the attacking quality of Cody Gakpo to edge past Turkey 2-1 in their Euro 2024 quarter-final on Sunday, with the forward forcing an own goal by the Turks to get them out of trouble and into the last four.

For much of the game nothing was going their way with Turkey taking the lead and controlling proceedings before an equaliser from Stefan De Vrij in the 70th minute.

But it was Gakpo's drive towards the goal in the 76th minute, sprinting in at the far post to connect with a low cross and with Turkey's Mert Muldur who sent the ball into his own net, that put the Dutch into the last four where they will face England.

The 25-year-old forward has been the Netherlands' lifeline in this tournament with three goals in five games.

Even if the second goal was not

credited to Gakpo and given as an own goal, Ronald Koeman's team would not be anywhere near a potential shot at their first European title since 1988 without his finishing.

Gakpo also scored the first goal in their 3-0 last-16 win over Romania before Donyell Malen added two more, and he netted twice more in the group stage, both times scoring his side's first goal. He has also made one assist.

But today was his most important contribution yet when he forced the Turkish own goal as Netherlands came from a goal down to earn victory.

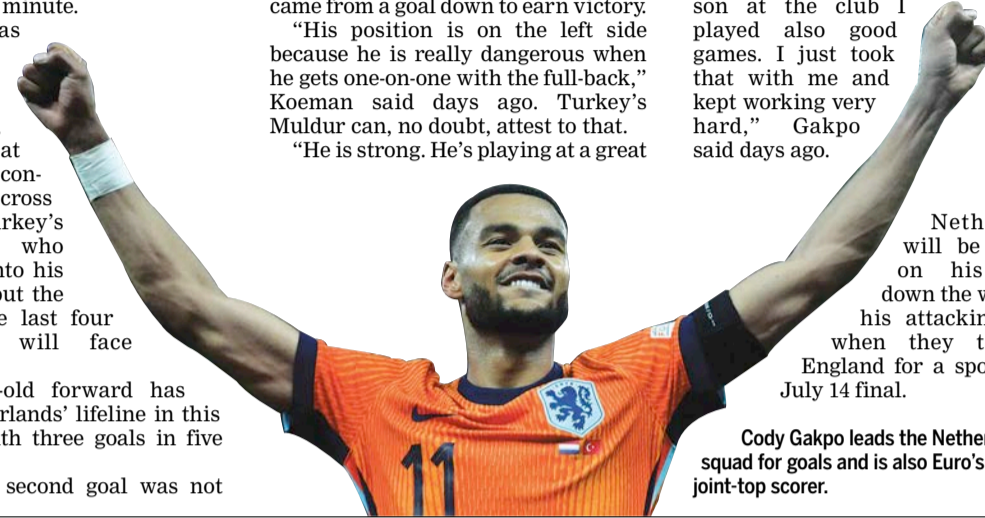
"His position is on the left side because he is really dangerous when he gets one-on-one with the full-back," Koeman said days ago. Turkey's Muldur can, no doubt, attest to that.

"He is strong. He's playing at a great

level this tournament. He's maybe been our most important player up to now and I hope the rest of my team can come up to his level," Koeman said.

Gakpo has blossomed on that left wing at the tournament, a position which he had played at PSV Eindhoven before his move to Liverpool in late 2022, while his Premier League form towards the end of the season seems to have carried over to the Euros.

"I think the last, I don't know how many games of the season at the club I played also good games. I just took that with me and kept working very hard," Gakpo said days ago.



Netherlands will be relying on his speed down the wing and his attacking drive when they take on England for a spot in the July 14 final.

Cody Gakpo leads the Netherlands squad for goals and is also Euro's joint-top scorer.

Uruguay and Panama reach Copa America semis

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAS VEGAS, JULY 7

Uruguay beat Brazil on penalties (4-2) to reach the semi-finals of Copa America after their game ended goalless on Sunday.

Uruguay finished the game with ten men after Nahitan Nandez was sent off in the 74th minute.

The first—and best—chance of a game of few opportunities came in the 35th minute when Uruguayan striker Darwin Nunez had a clear header in front of goal but mis-timed his effort which flew wide off his shoulder.

Within moments, Brazil created an opening of their own with Raphinha breaking clear, but Uruguay keeper Sergio Rochet stayed tall and made a vital save.

Brazil resorted too often to long balls forward but with only their 17-year-old talent Endrick, in for the suspended Vinicius Junior, as a central striker they lacked the physical presence to make that approach effective.

From then on it was clear that Uruguay were simply trying to make it to full-time and penalties and with no extra-time in Copa America, they

were able to achieve their aim.

After Federico Valverde scored with the first spot kick, Eder Militao saw his effort saved by the diving Rochet.

When Douglas Luiz hit the post for Brazil, they trailed 3-1 and Jose Gimenez had the chance to clinch the game for Uruguay. His effort was superbly saved by Alisson Becker.

Substitute Gabriel Martinelli scored to keep Brazil alive but midfielder Manuel Ugarte kept his cool to drive home the decisive kick and send the 15-times Copa champions into the last four.

Rodriguez inspires Colombia Confident Colombia marched into the semi-finals of the Copa America with an impressive 5-0 win over Panama.

James Rodriguez delivered another top class performance for Colombia, creating two goals and scoring a penalty as Panama were put to the sword.

Colombia went ahead in the eighth minute when Jhon Cordoba showed great strength to hold off his marker and power home a header from a Rodriguez corner.

Seven minutes later Rodriguez converted from the penalty spot after

Jhon Arias burst into the area and was brought down by diving Panama keeper Orlando Mosquera.

But four minutes before the break, Colombia put the game beyond the reach of the Central Americans when Rodriguez showed great awareness to take a quick free-kick from in his own half, lifting the ball over the top to Luis Diaz.

The Liverpool winger raced goalward and with Mosquera caught in no-man's land pulled off a wonderful chip to make it 3-0.

Colombia kept calm control of the game after the break and added a fourth in the 70th minute with a 25-yard blast from Richard Rios.

Daniel Munoz had looked to be brought down inside the box but before the referee could blow his whistle, Rios pounced on the loose ball and blasted home.

In stoppage time, Panama defender Jose Cordoba crashed into Santiago Arias in the area and with Rodriguez having been substituted, Miguel Borja slotted home the penalty to complete the rout.

Uruguay will face Colombia in Charlotte, North Carolina, in their last four on Thursday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Watch out for frustrations this afternoon, which could trigger stubborn, egotistical, or competitive behaviors amongst peers. Luckily, you'll have a chance to recenter and focus on yourself, ushering you into a moment of fun.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Shocking revelations around matters of the heart could find you this morning, dearest Taurus. Watch out for mood swings this afternoon, taking time to ground and nurture yourself if frustrations arise. Plan on unwinding with solitude.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
You'll have a gift for manifesting in strange and unusual ways, dearest Gemini, so be sure to focus on your goals while staying positive. Take time to connect with others, which could open you to new corners of society. Frustrations could brew below the surface.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
People could surprise you in pleasant ways, sweet Crab, especially when you are open to positive connection. Focus on your financial and professional goals, offering glimmers of insights on how to reach your highest potential. Try not to get distracted by your screens.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Honor your intuition while navigating these vibes, especially when, which promises to strengthen your connection with the other side. Signs and synchronicities can offer guidance on what comes next, though you may be required to learn from the past.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
The stars seek to bless you, darling Virgo, though you should take care to spread joy with the same enthusiasm that you receive it. Lean into change, providing insights on where to let go and how to move ahead.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
You could surprise yourself in business matters, dearest Libra, so don't hesitate to lean into your power, negotiate, and command respect. You'll find that it's easy to win over others, especially when knowledge is shared, and capabilities are demonstrated.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Let love be your guiding force, and your world will bloom in brilliant and unexpected ways. However, you'll want to think long-term when chasing new ideas or ambitions. Just remember to practice self-care and give your loved ones plenty of affection.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Focus on practicing self-love by changing your habits, dearest Archer. Just be mindful of what's already on your plate before taking more. Look for opportunities to get creative, broadening your horizons in the process.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Allow loved ones to see your most creative and playful self, dearest Capricorn. You'll sense change on the horizon, asking you to consider what must be released so you can reach higher levels of success. This energy is ideal for reinforcing your goals with positive thinking.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Choose what feels right in your heart, mind, and body, dearest Aquarius, even if doing so challenges convention. People will appreciate your authenticity, and you'll find that speaking your truth wins more friendship and approval than playing a role you don't quite fit into.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Trust in your brilliance, Pisces, even if your ideas seem far-fetched at first glance. You'll have a sharpened ability to outline realistic strategies when it comes to manifesting your visions. Just remember to take your time, which could cause excitement to get the better of you.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Long upholstered seat
 - Light wood
 - vital
 - Faill to include
 - Greek epic by Homer
 - Mummy
 - Extremely
 - Mottled horse
 - Dinghy
 - Result in
 - Make dull
 - "Get outta here!"
 - Nicely arranged
 - Chant
 - Tizzy
 - Luau fare
 - Place in southeast Asia
 - Permission
 - Colony members
 - Anger
 - Spoil
 - Brought into existence
 - Delivered
 - Chinese "way"
 - Made a point
 - Female bird
 - Wife of Geraint in Arthurian legend
- DOWN**
- Huffy
 - Foreboding
 - Authoritative command
 - "Finally!" (2 wds.)
 - Barnstormer's aircraft
 - Pasha
 - Dryer dust
 - Prince of Darkness
 - Worshipped
 - Create ill-will
 - Vietnam neighbor
 - Wet nurse
 - King Cole
 - Desktop pic
 - Fasten

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



WHY DO IT

Blending indie influences with experimental melodies

Prajina discusses her songwriting inspirations and the stories behind popular tracks 'Yo Sahar' and 'Hami'.

○ RISHIKA DHAKAL
KATHMANDU

It is September 2018. That time of the year when the weather slowly transitions from warm to chilly. Prajina is on her terrace to collect the sun-dried clothes. The line "Yo Sahar Chiso Hudai Cha" (the city is getting cold) keeps coming to her mind.

The line takes shape into a lyric, and after two years, Prajina has released her first-ever hit song, 'Yo Sahar'. Though the song reached its listeners slowly, it soon became a hit—thanks to social media platforms.

With thirteen songs released so far, Prajina, with her hit songs 'Yo Sahar' and 'Hami', has become a promising artist in Nepal's musical landscape.

A significant turning point in her career came when she had the opportunity to collaborate on 'Hola At Your Boy' with renowned Indian musicians Badshah and Krsna.

Growing up in Chitwan, her inclination towards music started when she began humming to Western songs. "Along with watching shows such as 'Hannah Montana', I used to listen to many songs that streamed on VHI," she says.

Like many children who aspire to emulate those they admire, Prajina dreamed of becoming an actress as she grew up.

"I was fascinated by a character named Alex in 'Wizards of Waverly Place'. I always thought of her as a wizard, and it

was only later that I realised she was an actress. That's when I decided I wanted to become an actress too," Prajina reflects on her childhood.

However, Prajina's wish to become an actress changed after she was introduced to Selena Gomez's songs 'Naturally' and 'The Scene' by her cousins.

As an introvert, Prajina showed reluctance to actively participate in extracurricular activities like athletics and dancing. Nonetheless, she had her reservations when it came to music.

Her goal is to do more live performances and broaden the reach of her music.

"Ever since I was a child, I participated in music competitions organised at school. I didn't know if I could sing well, but I sang anyway," she says.

Her teacher's encouragement boosted her confidence. Because of her vocal dexterity, her singing teacher often assigned her the responsibility of coordinating and managing the choir at her school.

"When I was in sixth grade, my school had me and another girl perform a duet. It was a big deal because I was performing on stage not in a group but on my own for the first time. After that performance, my teachers were impressed, and I felt like I was made for this," she recalls.

After graduating from high school, Prajina was all set to fly to Australia to pursue her Bachelor's degree. "Everything was almost finalised except for the interview, which I ended up cancelling," says Prajina.

Her mom insisted that she complete her bachelor's in Nepal. At the same time, she was on the lookout for Rizzlers to further her musical journey. That is when she found out about an artist named Bluesss.

"Bluesss saw something in me and encouraged me to stay back to pursue music," she reflects.

She collaborated with Bluesss to release her first EP, and Prajina formally kicked off her journey as an artist. Another turning point in her musical journey was when 'Roya', an event-organising platform, released her song 'Yo Sahar', which gained popularity.

"I applied to the 'Roya' platform, got selected, and performed. Since it was winter, they asked me which song I wanted to upload. I picked 'Yo Sahar' because the cold weather would make the song more relatable," she explains.

"My first gig was one or two months before 'Yo Sahar' became popular," Prajina recalls.

Having composed all her lyrics independently, Prajina began her lyric writing journey by leaning towards poetry. Slowly and steadily, she learned that music composition required verses, choruses, and transitions like bridge.

Therefore, she started writing songs



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PRAJINA

that integrated her poetic inclination with structured musical compositions, evolving her craft further.

Prajina says she does not limit herself to a specific genre in her singing style. Growing up, she mostly listened to mainstream Hindi and Nepali songs, which didn't allow her to explore the full depth of music.

"I started listening to indie artists like Joji, Clairo, Faye Webster, moving away from mainstream music. Their style of music felt calming and easier to sing."

It was only after discovering these indie artists that she began to appreciate music's diverse nuances and explored styles that felt more soothing and conducive to her vocal expression.

Prajina's music writing process involves crafting until the song takes shape. Her practice involved exploring the beats of different YouTube artists to create songs she liked. Her popular hits 'Yo Sahar' and 'Hami' were written during her practice sessions.

Apart from this, empathising with the characters' emotions from movies and series helps her form music. For instance, her song 'Hami' was inspired by the song 'Love Scenario' by iKON and the movie 'La La Land'.

"All these songs tell a story from different perspectives. Anything I see, even shows and movies, feels very personal to me and inspires me to create music," says Prajina.

In a music scene that favours traditional melodies over experimental music, her recent release, 'Kina Bhanenau', deviates from conventional composition. Instead, it is an experimental song composed after studying the subtleties of catchy tunes.

"In making the song, I studied why

some songs are catchy and remain with the audience long after the music ends, which was something I did not try early on," she says.

In summary, the song is about being cheated on—a universal feeling experienced not just by lovers but also by friends and others who are betrayed.

Analysing Nepal's musical landscape, the budding singer asserts that artists have to work independently. Without constant support, promotion, or PR, one never knows which song will be a hit.

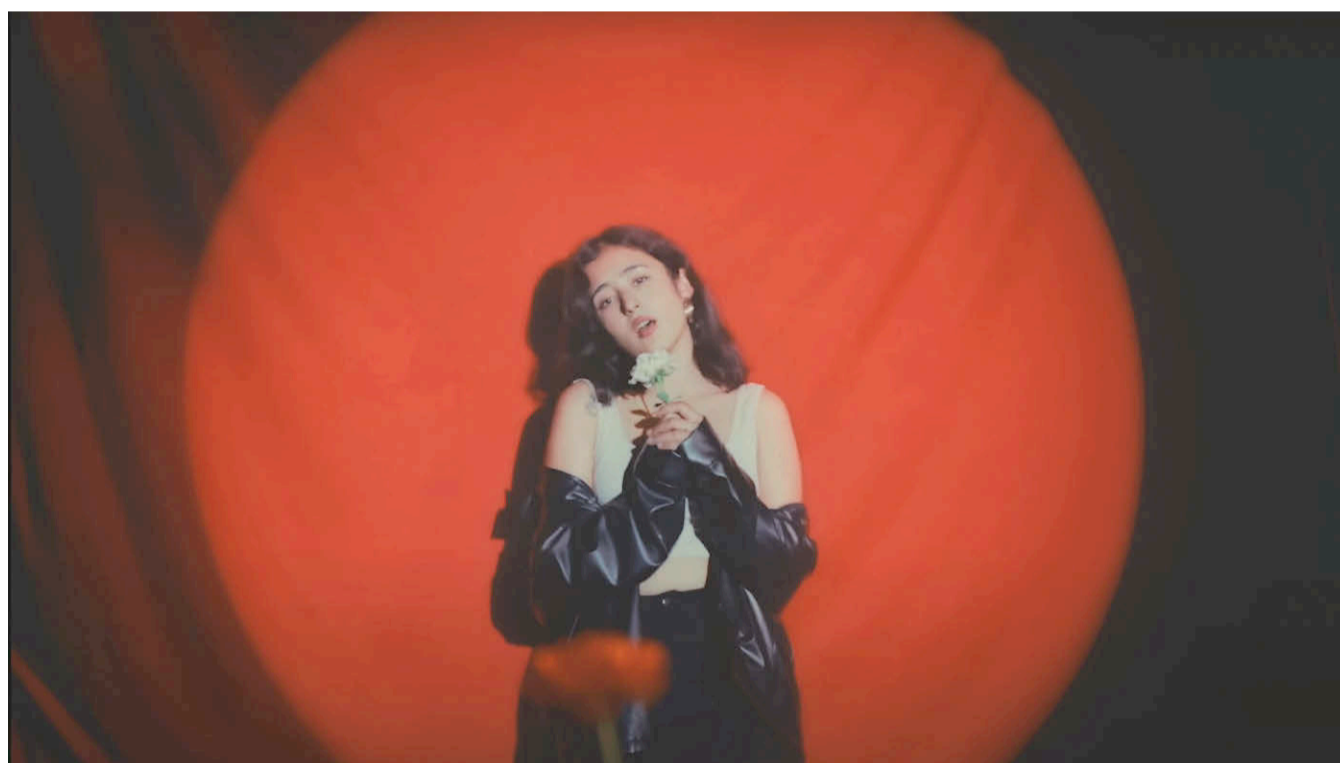
Reflecting on her career, Prajina expresses, "At first, I felt I had to persevere through everything because Nepal lacks the labels and funding to support artists on their journey."

For now, she has been funding her recording and production independently. "Sometimes, I even have to wait months to release a song due to lack of funds," she confesses. It is also challenging for experimental and unconventional compositions to gain acceptance, limiting the diversity and growth of music genres in the country.

Prajina hopes that her songs will reach more and more people. "Whether the audience likes the song or not is up to them, but if it doesn't reach them, there's no feedback. Without feedback, it's impossible to gauge impact or make improvements," she emphasises.

She adds, "Art is about sharing with others, not just creating for oneself. To build a career, you need to find an audience who appreciates your work."

Her goal is to do more live performances and broaden the reach of her experimental music. "I have written many English songs with various styles, but they remain unreleased as I wait for the right time to release them," she says.



Her recent release, 'Kina Bhanenau', deviates from conventional composition.

SCREENGAB VIA YOUTUBE

'Mirzapur' season three doesn't know where it's headed

The new season doesn't have the ruthless efficiency of its first two. It's safe to say that it has overstayed its welcome.

○ TATSAM MUKHERJEE

When was the last time you saw Pankaj Tripathi working on screen?

Arguably one of the brightest stars of the streaming era, whose stratospheric rise began with the first season of Amazon Prime Video's *Mirzapur* (2018), Tripathi's USP as an actor has always been his seeming ease—or the way he breathes life even into his "auto-pilot" performances.

While playing versions of himself in several Hindi films and shows, very rarely does Pankaj Tripathi give a performance whose artifice one can see through. A significant chunk of Tripathi's Kaleen Bhaiya is powered by his regal costume, his throne and his assured demeanour. In the third season, one can almost see the production challenging Tripathi to resurrect this character minus any of these crutches.

After being near-fatally injured in the second season, Tripathi's Kaleen Bhaiya spends the first few episodes of the third season in coma, slowly finding his footing as the season goes on.

He does not have the same footprint as the earlier seasons, but what remains palpable is how hard Tripathi is seen working to fill his character outline. The strained dialogue delivery (because he is the metaphorical injured lion), the stiff body language, and the red gamchha (towel) around his neck almost seem like Tripathi is parodying his own 'ease' in some scenes.

Mirzapur has always been a fascinating show to dissect.

A heady concoction of high and low art, the series invokes staples of a pulpy Prakash Jha hinterland story, fused with the whimsical humour of Anurag Kashyap's Wasseypur films; a dash of

Coppola, Ram Gopal Varma and Shakespeare thrown into all this. Even amid all its 'inspiration', *Mirzapur* has nearly always managed to be its own thing with rich, colourful characters and dialogues, who can be surprisingly introspective when the time comes.

Starting in the aftermath of the finale of the second season, most of the season hinges between Guddu Pandit (Ali Fazal) and Sharad Shukla (Anjum Sharma) vying for the throne of Purvanchal, and another track occurs between Bharat Tyagi (Vijay Varma) and Golu Gupta (Shweta Tripathi Sharma)—who are trying to settle scores for the blood bath that happened at the end of season 2, where Shatrughan (also played by Vijay Varma) shot his twin, Bharat, and then took on his identity.

If it sounds convoluted, it's by design. This is exactly the kind of B-movie plot twist that the makers of *Mirzapur* relish. In a hilarious scene in the third season, as Shatrughan pretends to be Bharat, a scene from Farhan Akhtar's *Don* (2006), where the titular Don is shown taking the place of his lookalike, plays in the background.

It helps that Akhtar (and producer Ritesh Sidhwani) are the producers here too, but it showcases how much fun *Mirzapur* can be when everyone hits their mark in the show. Alas, in the third season, such moments are rare.

The third season goes around in circles as Guddu stakes claim to be the rightful heir of *Mirzapur*. Sharad, who sneakily shipped Kaleen Bhaiya and nursed him back to health, is also a contender. Golu is

doggedly pursuing Kaleen Bhaiya, Shatrughan is trying to adjust to his new life as Bharat, while fixating on how he's going to get his revenge on Golu for her deception. Ramakant Pandit (Rajesh Tailang), Guddu's father, is intent on serving his sentence for killing a cop, who was going to kill Guddu in a fake encounter.

Chief Minister Madhuri Yadav (Isha Talwar) announces her vision of turning Uttar Pradesh into a bhay-mukt (fear-free) state, scheming with cops to bump off local baahubalis. Bina Tripathi (a creepy Rasika Dugal) has her own eyes set on the throne for *Mirzapur* after having undergone indignities in the first two seasons.

A large part for this dip in graph has to do with a variety of reasons:

First is Sharad's character—who takes the place of Munna Tripathi (Divyenndu).

As Sharad, Anjum Sharma is never as colourful, cheeky or captivating as Munna. He's straitjacketed into a character without any unusual flavour. Similarly, Isha Talwar's Madhuri Yadav is an acting assignment that seems to be feeding off of Katrina Kaif's role in Prakash Jha's *Rajneeti* (2010).

It's a flatly written role, performed even less memorably. Vijay Varma, as Shatrughan pretending to be Bharat, is reliably trusted to do some vile things in the company of sex workers. Still, the showrunners seem to treat his character and story with selective amnesia.

Shweta Tripathi Sharma as Golu is a good mix of vulnerable, acute and acidic. But one of the season's biggest disappointments is the arc of Guddu Pandit. Fazal's is one of the longest and most committed arcs in Indian streaming, and it's hard watching it go off the rails in the third season.

As a haunted Guddu searches for more interiority than he's ever done, Fazal dials up the theatrics to Al Pacino proportions. To the point, where *Mirzapur* S03 never quite reciprocates the love and effort of Fazal's sincerity, making him look silly in more than one scene.

Credit where it's due, *Mirzapur* is still 'binge-able'. It continues to have cheeky, compelling dialogue that riffs on current affairs, a few characters worth investing in, and a landscape revolving around peoples' lust for power.

It will never not be an intriguing premise for a show. But the third season of *Mirzapur* doesn't have the ruthless efficiency of its first two seasons. It's safe to say that *Mirzapur* has overstayed its welcome. It's no longer the hungry underdog, but an overfed, spoiled veteran, resting on its past laurels.

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